



FIA Matters!

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Produced by FIA Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing
Submit stories by e-mail to FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Today's big story

Dexter Elmhurst Community Center serves clients, earns awards

From W. Wimbush, Director
Wayne County FIA Dexter-Elmhurst Center, Detroit
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Wayne County Family Independence Agency's Dexter Elmhurst Community Services Center in Detroit had a busy year hosting events, serving the public and receiving awards.

For the third straight year the center hosted a statewide Cranbrook Institute of **Science RoboFest** competition. More than 150 youths participated in this event through Cranbrook Institute, which is housed within the center. The Robotic-Building Competition was held April 24 to highlight youth robotics. Trophies and financial scholarship awards were presented to winning youths.

Our youths cannot afford to attend Bloomfield Hills-based Cranbrook. In a cooperative gesture we asked, and they agreed, to become an onsite partner physically stationed in the center. The onsite program provides educational youth projects such as the Robotic Building Program.

The director of Bloomfield Hills-based Cranbrook Institute of Science scholars program, Dr. Gerald Walker, presented the Dexter Elmhurst Community Services Center with a special recognition appreciation plaque for hosting the event.

Our center was presented with a **Spirit of Detroit Award** May 6 presented by City of Detroit Council member Kay Everett for its Earned Income Tax Credit program. In 2004, we became the first Wayne County FIA site to participate in this Program.

At the center's third annual **Back-To-School Festival** held Aug. 10. City of Detroit Council member Jo Ann Watson presented the center with its second Spirit of Detroit award for "exceptional achievement, outstanding leadership, and dedication to improving the quality of life."

The Back-To-School Festival highlights youths that have successfully participated in our school and community programs. During the event, 20 community youths that participated in our computer training, repair and computer building program received free computers, monitors and software.



During the back to school festival Aug. 10 (left to right): W. Wimbush, director of Dexter-Elmhurst Center; Lorraine Hurst, Dexter-Elmhurst Center; U.S. Rep. John Conyers from Detroit; JoAnn Watson, Detroit City Council; Jerome Rutland, director of Wayne County FIA; Michigan FIA director Marianne Udow; Wayne County Commissioner Keith Williams. Kneeling in front is Helen Moore, president of the Dexter Elmhurst Advisory Board.

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Located at 11825 Dexter Avenue in Detroit, the Wayne County FIA Dexter Elmhurst Community Services Center has served 30,000 community residents in the past three years. It was previously known as the Westside Attention Center. In 1997 the FIA changed the focus and established the facility as a community services center. It now houses onsite agencies including Neighborhood Services Organization, Lula Belle Stewart's Teen Pregnant Program, Detroit Area Agency on Aging, Senior Citizen Food & Friendship Program, Wayne County Sheriff's "Dose of Reality" Youth Crime Prevention Program, after school programs and Detroit Mini-2 Police Station.

Directors share Digital Government Award

From Kurt Weiss, Office of Communications

Michigan Department of Information Technology, Lansing

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A recent national survey ranked Michigan first in the nation in the use of information technology to transform and improve government. The Digital States Survey, conducted by the Center for Digital Government in conjunction with Government Technology magazine, is the nation's most recognized and respected study of information technology in all 50 states.

Michigan received the number one ranking for the first time, moving up from a second place finish from the previous survey taken in 2002. Governor Granholm accepted the award at the National Governor's Association meeting in July.

As part of an ongoing series of meetings to strategize about the department's technology initiatives for the future, FIA director Marianne Udow recently met with Department of Information Technology director Teri Takai, who shared the award with Udow.

"All the departments should share in this award," Takai said. "It's because of the hard work of many FIA employees in partnership with our information technology employees that we received this award."

Other top finishers in the award were Washington state in second place and Virginia at number three. Rounding out the top ten were Indiana, Arizona, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Arkansas, Colorado and North Carolina.



L-r: FIA director Marianne Udow, DIT director Teri Takai and DIT deputy director Ken Theis.

Genesee County's fourth annual Celebration of Success

From Eva Pyles

Genesee County FIA, Flint

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Genesee County FIA held its fourth annual "Celebration of Success" for outstanding staff and partner efforts July 28.

In this annual event, selected staff members receive Employee of the Year awards for going above and beyond the call of duty on a continuous basis. Awards are also presented to volunteers, foster parents and other local agencies.

The following "Employee of the Year" awards were presented at this year's ceremony:

- Administrative Support – **Sandra Churchill**
- ES – **Lavonia Alston**
- FIS – **Paula Cariuty**
- Services – **Kanisha Underwood**
- Management – **Linda Best**
- Volunteer Services – **John Rustin** and **Laszlo Angyal**

The following community partners who demonstrated exceptional collaborative efforts during the past year with Genesee County FIA were also recognized:

- Legal Advocate of the Year - Teresa Holifield
- Child Advocate of the Year - Yvwanita Hubbard-Richardson
- Adult Advocate of the Year - Genesee County Sheriff Department
- Family and Career Advocate of the Year - Camille Hang
- Bob Craig/Juanita Holland Honorary Award - Vera Rison

Genesee County FIA was also able to present scholarships to two foster care recipients who plan to attend college. The scholarship money was raised through various casual days during the month of July and from a donation by **Sam and Denise Chambers**, the director of Genesee County FIA and her husband. Needless to say the young scholars were extremely excited to receive the monetary donations.

Diversity event on cultural awareness

From Karen F. Tripp
Services Supervisor
Kalamazoo County FIA
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An Aug. 24 diversity event at Kalamazoo County FIA, "Competency: Cultural Awareness", worked on our ability to initiate and manage cultural change within the organization.

Planning committee members **Rebecca Brinks**, foster care supervisor, and **Karen Tripp** invited Pauline Becker, representative of the Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders, and Sally Householder from the local Early On program to conduct a presentation about their programs for services and payments staff.

As a result, our staff have a greater understanding of the multitude of needs of the specialized populations represented by the two children's organizations.

Summer zoo visit by Clinton-Gratiot foster & adoptive families

By Donna Kriss, Foster Care Recruiter
Strong Families/Safe Children in Gratiot County
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July 8 was a wonderful day for Gratiot and Clinton county foster and adoptive families – it was the first annual visit to Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek. More than 130 parents, foster & adoptive kids and support staff attended.

Tonya Randall, licensing worker in Clinton County, helped organize the event together with **Kenton Schulze**, children's services supervisor. Some staff supervised foster children for the day, riding the train with them, visiting the African safari and feeding giraffes.

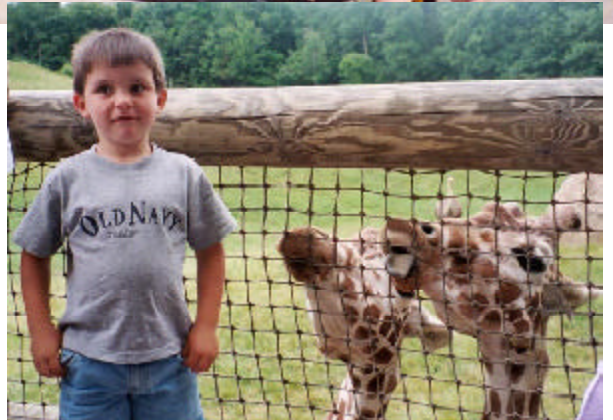
During the visit children were able to pet animals at the children's zoo section, see stories about dinosaurs, visit the gift shop and see animals in their natural habitat. The casual atmosphere extended to a picnic lunch assembled by Tonya's fellow FIA staff during their own time.

The idea for the trip originated with the Gratiot County Foster Parent Support Group. Funding came from donations and a recruitment and retention funds grant. Strong Families Safe Children's funds, through the Gratiot County Multipurpose Collaborative Council, includes funding for foster adoptive recruiter Donna Kriss. We look forward to next year's trip.



Karley Schulze (in red above) and Austin Smith were among children having fun at the zoo visit. Austin also visited with a couple zoo residents (right).

Binder Park Zoo boasts one of the largest giraffe herds in the country in its Wild Africa experience. Get more information at this link:
www.binderparkzoo.org



Wayne County FIA summer youth initiative

From Steve Rockwood, Community Resource Coordinator
Wayne County FIA, Detroit
RockwoodS@michigan.gov

The Wayne County Family Independence Agency sponsored a summer youth initiative during the months of June, July and August. The program offered several educational and cultural activities for youth ages 8-17. Children and parents from the county's Family Resource Center schools were given the opportunity to attend the Summer Youth Initiative rally held June 18 at the Northwest Activities Center in Detroit. Activities included games, music, lunch, prizes, information about Summer Youth programs and a motivational speech by "Bushman" from FM 98 WJLB radio. Transportation was provided for children and parents to attend the event.

The Girl Scouts of Metro Detroit and YMCA offered programs for children ages 8-13. The programs included teamwork activities, self-esteem building and field trips. Employment Training and Design Inc. offered a computer building class for youth between the ages 14-17. Participants in the computer class were taught how to identify components of a computer and their function. Youths were able to build their own new computer. Upon completion of the class, students were able to keep their new computer and also received a new printer.

Sandra Alexander, mother of a child that attended the summer program, said it helped her son very much. "Every day that he went, he came home more and more excited," she said about son Courtney. "The experience has been very enriching for him. He has focused on a career and is very happy that he had the experience. He's hoping to continue what he learned next summer if they continue the program."

The Summer Youth Initiative program ended Aug. 20. Children that completed the program received a backpack with back-to-school supplies and a \$20 Target gift certificate.

Date: Aug. 5
To: Georgia Cambell, District Manager
Wayne County FIA Child & Family Services, Central Operations, Detroit
Subj: Phyllis Edwards

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) extends its gratitude to you for the support given to Phyllis Edwards who has served this association as a national volunteer leader for the past three years. Her term ended June 30. Ms. Edwards held the seat of member-at-large on NASW's board of directors and was appointed to executive and program coordinating committees and the Bylaws Task Force whose work will continue until July 2005. In these capacities, Ms. Edwards' commitment and professionalism have been evident. We are proud to have had Ms. Edwards as one of the leaders of our association. We appreciate the support you have given during her tenure on the board and hope that you will be supportive of her continued involvement in her professional association.

Elizabeth Clark, Executive Director
National Association of Social Workers
Washington, D.C.

■ *Phyllis Edwards is supervisor of the 24-hour children's protective services unit in Wayne County.*

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

Date: July 30
To: Andrew Zylstra, Director Kent County FIA, Grand Rapids
Subj: Laura Turner

The Office of Children's Ombudsman (OCO) would like to take this opportunity to recognize Kent County CPS worker, **Laura Turner**, for her work on behalf of (a case and) the children in this matter. The OCO has investigated a complaint related to Kent County FIA's handling of the CPS case concerning the children. A letter of affirmation regarding CPS case handling was recently forwarded to your agency. Aside from our letter affirming Kent County FIA's handling of the case, we felt compelled to issue a separate letter recognizing the exemplary work completed by Ms. Turner under the supervision of **Michaelene White**.



Laura Turner

Ms. Turner assumed responsibility for investigating a complaint involving these children when a neighboring county transferred the complaint after determining it had a conflict of interest. Ms. Turner was required to travel to the children's county of residence to conduct interviews, verify child safety, and take whatever protective action was necessary. While attempting to do her job, Ms. Turner often faced a hostile and combative environment. Vigorous attempts were made to sabotage Ms. Turner's efforts and sideline her attempts to obtain the information she needed to complete the investigation.

Kent County FIA's success in obtaining court jurisdiction and protecting interventions for these children was due in large part to Ms. Turner's persistence and exemplary level of professionalism. Her coordination with several levels of FIA supervision throughout the CPS case was also noteworthy. The OCO was very impressed with the manner in which Kent County supervisors, including CPS supervisors, program manager, and district manager supported Ms. Turner and coordinated efforts to ensure the protection of these children.

Submitting letters for publication

Client letters praising our work are very popular with other employees. To submit a letter for publication:

- Ensure your supervisor knows about this and approves.
 - Have the client sign **Consent for Publication** form, which is downloadable from the MS Word template as form **0199.dot**. This form must include the names of children included in the letter (same for newsletter stories).
 - Send the letter and a copy of the signed consent form to me by e-mail or by fax (517-373-8471).
 - Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of the employee(s) cited in the letter.
- Larry VanDeSande

VanDeSandeL@michigan.gov

The OCO commends Ms. Turner for her commitment and strong advocacy on behalf of the children. We have no doubt she is a highly valued colleague within the FIA and that her dedication as a CPS worker has contributed immensely to the safety and protection of children in Kent County.

Lynne Martinez

Children's Ombudsman
Lansing

■ *Office of Children's Ombudsman investigates complaints about children served by the CPS, adoption and foster care programs.*

FIA Matters! is a product of Michigan's Family Independence Agency
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Larry VanDeSande, editor Submit stories by e-mail to: FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov